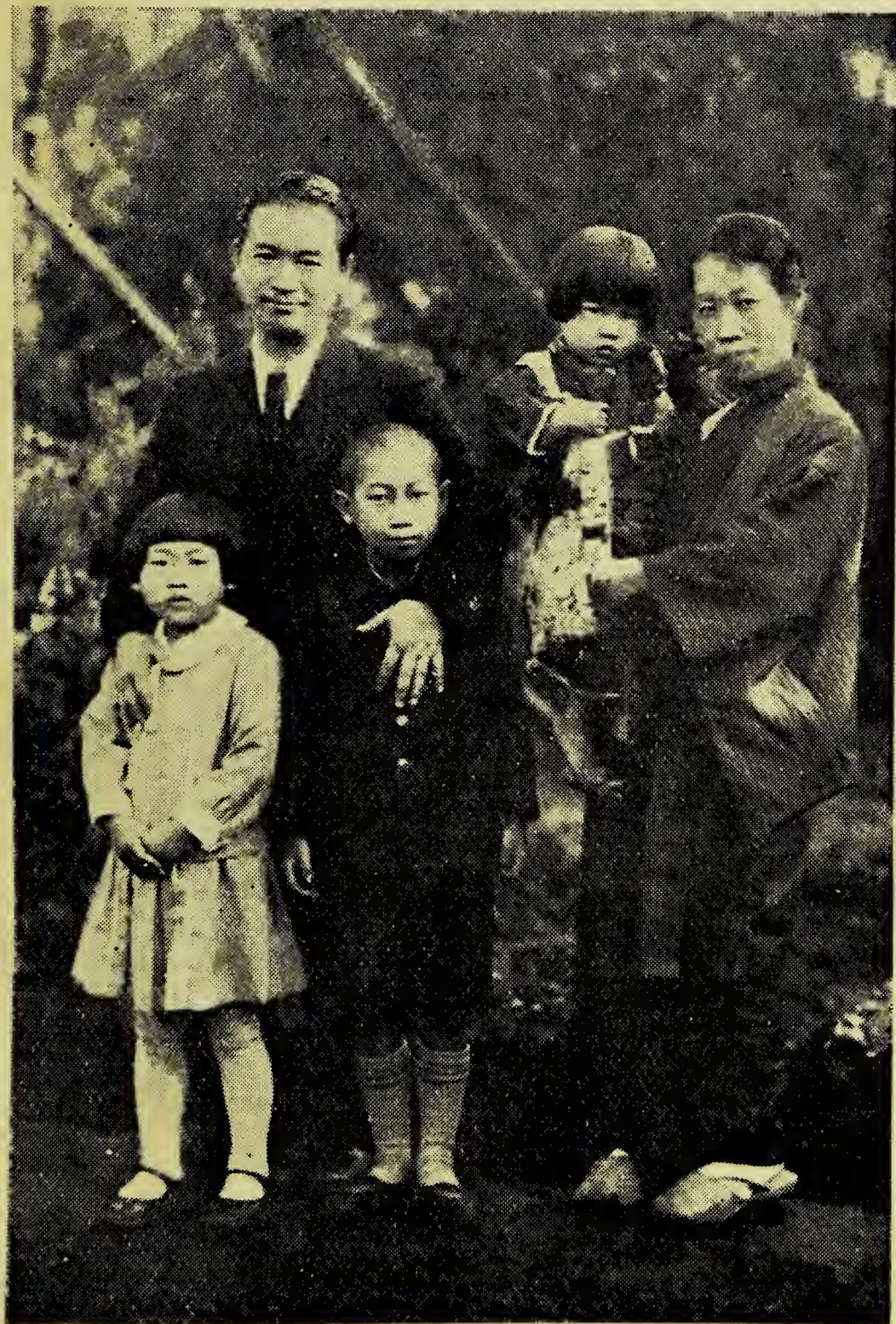


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# Kagawa--Gambler for God

By ALLAN A. HUNTER



Kagawa and Family



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# KAGAWA—GAMBLER FOR GOD

by

Allan A. Hunter

Cartoonist, poet and author of sixty-odd books, social worker, labor leader, life changer, economic evangelist, peace promoter and bridge builder between East and West, Toyohiko Kagawa of Japan is a world figure with a fascinating life story:

"I am fond of men," he says. "The worst, most fear-inspiring, demonized murderer somewhere in his make-up has that which is irresistible . . . . ."

"Redemption means that when a person has committed a crime against me, instead of revenging myself upon him, I will try to redeem him and give energy for him and put him above myself."

No man living, not even excepting Gandhi and Schweitzer, has more right to speak of LOVE THE LAW OF LIFE (the title of one of his popular books) than this consecrated little man who radiates courage and friendliness. At twenty-two, on the day before Christmas, 1909, he rented for almost nothing a house seemingly no bigger than a matchbox, supposed to be tormented by a ghost. What haunted his imagination was not the ghastly thought of the murder that had been committed in that house but the creative possibilities of living there. He says he loves adventures and ghosts. Let us hear what happened from Kagawa's own lips:

"As I was setting the house in order, the chief of the gamblers came to me and asked if I would take a disciple. 'How a disciple?', I asked. 'Let him live with you and eat rice.' He said that this person was unemployed, and drank from six in the morning till twelve at night. 'All right, ask him to come.'"

"So Maruyama came to sleep with me the first night spent in the slums. In the morning I discovered that he had the itch and that I had caught the itch too.

"On the fourth day Mr. Izu came—a beggar, who also wanted to be enrolled as my disciple. Then another person came, and altogether I had to feed four persons on seven and a half dollars a month. Try it! We could not eat rice cooked in the usual manner, but had to cook it in a great deal of water, with little rice and much water, like the gruel one makes for sick people. It went on for four months like that, and gradually what little money I had, disappeared, and my pockets were empty. I did not know what to do, and so stopped eating a noon meal.

"One day I was sitting in my chair writing and Mr. Tatsu came and wanted some pocket money for drinking. I said 'No, I haven't much money and none to give for drink.' And he said, 'You help the beggars, gamblers, pickpockets, murderers and idiots and so you ought to help me also!' And he shook the leg of my desk all day long so that I could not write . . . . Later he killed a man and was sent to prison. When he came out of prison he came and lived with me."

For more than fourteen years Kagawa lived there in the slums, in a room six feet by nine, among beggars, thugs, prostitutes, murderers and imbeciles. The door of his little matchbox house opened not on a street but on a narrow alley where the filth during the rainy season oozed five inches thick. At night the smells were so violent that a fellow student who had decided to work with him was at first unable to sleep. There were bed-bugs. But they became a sort of game. On hot summer nights he would go after them. Fifty-five he considered a fairly good score, but he recalls capturing as high as ninety.

Sharing his bed on the floor with a homeless man, Kagawa caught the trachoma that destroyed the sight of one eye. There was a time when he had four murderers as guests. Once a half-drunken guest demanded money to buy more liquor. Kagawa refused. The man knocked out four of his front teeth. The host, however, continued to take care of this incredible guest, and now he humorously turns the incident to use. "You see," he smiles, "I now have an alibi for not pronouncing the English language adequately." For many months fifteen cents a day was all he spent on himself, and bean-curd was about all he had to eat. When the annual typhus epidemics visited the slums Kagawa tended the victims. Three times the bubonic plague came; then smallpox, dysentery and cholera. The man who had himself passed through the hell of physical despair nursed the sick and dying. Abandoned men in the last stages of intestinal tuberculosis he would bring back to his room, wash their bodies with his own hands and keep them there. If one such came within twenty feet of us we would probably leave the spot hastily on account of the unendurable odor. Somehow or other, he did not contract these diseases. Perhaps his white blood corpuscles are disciplined to endure even as his spirit is. Certainly his body is a remarkable example of the freedom that comes to those who live simply and above all fear, who so love men that they discover the Kingdom of God within themselves.

His mother was a dancing girl who had become his father's concubine and the boy was legally adopted. When he was four years old both she and his father died. The father had been secretary to the Emperor and his grand-father was head man over nearly a score of villages. The little boy was handed over to the father's legal wife. There were times when she and her



mother would curse him and take turns beating him, and other times when he would be locked up in a lonely outhouse. As a thirteen-year-old boy he went to live with an uncle, said to be the richest man in the province. This uncle was ambitious for his nephew and planned for him a diplomatic career. When the adolescent boy became a Christian the wealthy uncle gave him this choice: either to renounce his new faith or to be cut off without a "sen". Kagawa chose to be poor. Studying in a mission school, he found not only the love of God, but the power to practice it. At the age of nineteen he was preaching for forty days in the City of Toyohashi. Once, while it was raining, his body began to sway to and fro. He felt horribly cold. But he kept on, telling passers-by of his new experience: "I tell you God is love, and I will affirm God is love till I fall. Where there is love, God and life reveal themselves." Although he almost fainted with fever, he managed to stay on his legs and finally to stumble back to where he was staying. For two days he lay there, spitting up blood,—and no money to call the doctor. At the end of the second day somebody sent for a doctor who said he was a hopeless case of tubercular pneumonia. Kagawa could not cough or even breathe without effort. One day he fasted and prayed continuously. Suddenly in mid-afternoon he felt himself filled with the joy of a great illumination, the assurance of "crossing the deathline." Years later he wrote a book of that title. One hundred and fifty thousand copies were sold in a few months. (In our American libraries this amazing autobiographical novel is known as **BEFORE THE DAWN**.) Kagawa is sure that it was the faith he received from adventurous contact with God that has kept him alive ever since. Three or four years ago he had nine hemorrhages. He sleeps only five hours a

night, arising while the stars are still shining to pray for the people of Japan, or Russia or China or America, or the great Japanese family and the Kingdom of God. And yet as you see him inviting you to "try it" you can hardly believe that the Los Angeles physician may have been right who declared that most of his body outside of the brain is infected. The amazing energy and creative power of the man is suggested in the following incident. One of his friends, insisting that he rest, cancelled all engagements for a month. "All right," said Kagawa, "I'll retire." But his friends failed to check on him. Into his little house on the outskirts of Tokyo which he had built with his own hands, he smuggled a stenographer. At the end of thirty days of enforced leisure he was "rested"; but the stenographer had taken down copy for three books! At times there has been a large income from his popular writings—as much as \$750.00 a month; but always he has turned the money earned from books and lectures into the social and religious movements which are his meat and drink. There are five settlement houses and many peasant gospel schools to be financed. He and Mrs. Kagawa and the children, live, themselves upon an economic basis which would seem impossible for most Americans. He could be financially independent. But he says, "When such multitudes are plunged so deeply into suffering, I, for one, can not possibly be content to live an easy life."

Kagawa has no fear for his own security. "I stand against all learning, all institutions, all governments, all arts, all religions that reject love. I protest against every so-called church which preaches faith and fails to love. I oppose the politicians who rely on force and know nothing about love. I had rather die quickly by the sword than die of thirst in a loveless desert." Kagawa has proved in action that he has no fear of dying

by the sword. In 1928 he founded or helped to found the National Anti-war League opposing war and all preparations for war, and as a result was saved from a super-patriotic mob by some quickwitted police who guarded him. At that time the militarists were circulating handbills recommending, "Kill Kagawa!" Even as a sixteen year old boy he stood out almost single-handed against the hysteria of his own nation at war with Russia. Some schoolmates at the Presbyterian College in Tokyo turned on him.

"Do you say Japan made a mistake to declare war against Russia?," a belligerent senior asked him.

"Yes," answered the young war-resister.

"You are a fool! Now obey our orders!", and someone struck him on the cheek. Kagawa, who had been reading Tolstoi and the Sermon on the Mount, did not strike back. Many times that night he was beaten. But he refused to keep quiet. He preached peace more than ever. His reliance on soul force produced some interesting results. Some of the men who insulted him and injured him are now leading Christians in Japan, and they have become quite friendly to the "fighting pacifist."

Kagawa was in America, 1915-17, studying part of that time at Princeton, and also in 1925; and when he returned from his third trip to America in the fall of 1931, friends feared he would be assassinated by nationalists who would brook no interference with their program of invading China. For a time it was rumored in this country that he was being held in prison as a conscientious objector. But for some reason or other he has been neither stabbed nor jailed. An American living in Japan gives this explanation: Men in the army receive letters from their poor relatives working on the farms, "Kagawa is for us; don't kill him!" If he were



identified with the upper classes instead of being one with the poor and disinherited as Jesus was, he might already have fallen at the hands of inflamed patriots.

However that may be, he refused to cut the lines of communication with the Chinese. To the Christians in Tsinan he sent this daring message: "Dear Brothers and Sisters; I want to ask your pardon for my nation. Because of what we are doing I cannot preach in the name of Christ. I ask your attention to this fact, however, that even in Japan at least a majority of the people were against sending any kind of troops to your province of Shantung, and we Christians were bitterly opposed to it. Therefore pardon us, pardon me especially, because our Christian forces were not strong enough to get the victory over the militarists. But the day will come when we shall be, and when both nations will be peaceful and harmonious in the name of Christ."

After the Japanese troops ravaged Shanghai, he spoke out:

"Again I become the child of an aching heart,  
Carrying the burden of Japan's crime,  
Begging pardon of China and of the world  
With a shattered soul—  
Again am I a child of sadness."

And in 1934 he visited the scene where shells from his country had destroyed homes in Shanghai. In the battle-scarred church where a Chinese pastor with his family had "disappeared", Chinese Christians prayed with Kagawa. Stirred by his humility and passion for reconciliation, they experienced the fact that in Christ there is no barrier named "Japan" or "China".

Kagawa in his own life has matched soul force against brute force and he knows its potency. In the slums the drunken hoollums with their daggers would grab him by the collar, itching to beat somebody up,

and why not this Kagawa fellow who was always preaching to them to turn the other cheek and love your enemies? The young man would look them straight in the eye and without terror or anger would ask God to forgive them. His attackers could not stand up against the clear friendly look of him. Again and again their nerve would break and they would slink off muttering: "It isn't worth the trouble. What's to be gained in killing such a fellow?" He has no confidence in the brute force that kills, whether in individual or international relationships. It will solve no problems. If it did, he ironically argues, then we should employ earthquakes and volcanoes. He trusts to "the unseen, inner forces" such as science, invention, discovery, art, drama, morals, religion, and vigorous effort toward the supreme good that would enhance life for every person. He would agree with Jesus, "I came not to bring peace but a sword," a sword not of metal but of spirit that grapples fearlessly with the evils not only of the war-system, but also of prostitution, the organized liquor traffic and exploitation of underpaid laborers. At different times he has come into conflict with the government. But he says, "The true patriot must sometimes condemn his country's acts; but it is not enough to denounce our nation, we must love it and through love and suffering, redeem it; I belong to God first, and then I belong to Japan."

Because he is so ardently and convincingly for the sword of the spirit as opposed to the violence of communism, his life is sometimes threatened by those who sentimentally believe that brotherhood will come tomorrow if violence be used today. He is for social justice and the loving coercion that he thinks will in the long run secure the abundant life, in a society where all will share and work together. But he is against the unlov-

ing coercion that kills and that fails to reverence the personality of even greedy men.

For his ideal of a reconstructed society aiming at the Kingdom of God, he has already paid a heroic price. Three times has he been convicted of "dangerous ideas". Put behind the bars thirteen years ago for leading a strike of thirty thousand dockyard laborers, he enjoyed a breathing spell working on a book that later became a best-seller. His prison quarters were luxurious as to space, eight or so square feet larger than his three mat room in the slums. "I walked in the cell about two miles every day. Thus I could think of my residence as being two miles wide." In the jail he made many friends. These protested so vehemently about the imprisonment of "Mr. Non-Resistance" that the guards in despair took him to the female prison. "The guards were ladies; they were kind, mended my clothes and said to me, 'You were good to the laborers, so you must not be ashamed about being in prison.'"

No one could say fairly that Kagawa's religion is a flight from the social struggle. Due partly to his campaigns year after year, night labor has been abolished in the cotton mills and the employment of women discontinued in the mines. His gift for making facts exciting, stimulated the House of Peers to broadcast one of his pamphlets and to appropriate approximately ten million dollars for rebuilding the worst sections of large cities into sanitary apartment houses. He has helped to organize credit union pawn shops where the harassed poor may borrow money at four per cent instead of the old thirty per cent; he has aided in the establishment of the Japanese Federation of Labor; the first Farmer-Labor Party in Japan; a mission to lepers; a white cross society against tuberculosis; unemployment insurance; cooperatives; kindergartens; night schools for laborers



and peasants.

Kagawa's program of sharing is a venture of trust in the possibilities of personality. His two basic principles are cooperation and unselfishness. He has already promoted peasant's unions and village cooperatives so that tenants may have a fairer return on what they produce and farmers may produce and sell their commodities without the usual wastage.

Among the churches he has started "The Resurrection Mutual Aid Society" which charges members fifteen cents a month and gives a sick benefit of \$7.50 a month. This organization meets the desperate need of those who, stricken with tuberculosis, cannot otherwise afford the cost of effective treatment. Recently, with the help of physicians with a Christian spirit, he has established a cooperative hospital with a nominal entrance fee.

"To live a life and to live up to life, is economics, and it is religion," declares Kagawa. "Without God there is no economics and there is no life; for God is life eternal . . . . . We cannot be said to be complete in religion until we handle even the problem of bread religiously in our lives." He sees the effort toward world peace as a long-term effort, requiring a gradual but steady shifting away from the competitive to the cooperative basis of producing and distributing goods. His plea to the missionaries in Japan and the Christians in the West is to "help us spread the Cooperatives through the church, till they become a nation-wide movement, potent to meet the needs of our small nation, which has the densest population of any in the world for its arable area."

It is not enough to save individuals: we must cooperate to reconstruct society. During the fourteen years and eight months of his intimate work with the destitute in the slums, perhaps eighty-five struggled to be Christians. But because of the pull of their sordid

surroundings many of these slipped back into the old ways. Out of his bitter experience, Kagawa has learned that there must be collective "at-one-ment, bringing every one and everything together,—the destitute, the disabled, the enfeebled people, into a high, elevated position, into the very heart of God." Accordingly, when he puts it up to men and women and youth to sign decision cards and commit their whole lives to the following of Jesus, he makes it clear that this means social responsibility. Becoming a Christian means building cooperatives in your home village or on your campus or in your church and if possible doing something definite in behalf of organized labor.

Even a short sketch of Kagawa's life and work can not omit a word about his chief helper. A girl, born in a well to do home, through financial reverses was compelled to go out as a servant in the house. Later she worked in a factory operated by a Christian. A preacher came every Sunday to preach to the workers, and one day he brought with him a young man to teach them to sing the hymns. This was the beginning of an acquaintance that eventually led to the conversion of Haruko and to a friendship which ripened into love. Kagawa says of her: "When I went to live in the slums I felt that it would be wrong to ask any woman to share such a life. When Haruko with some of her companions came to help in my Christmas parties, etc., I noticed that she did not patronize or condescend to the slum people but treated them as equals. Afterwards when I told her of my determination not to marry she challenged my idea that a woman could not gladly endure as much as myself.

"So she came to me, and has met every test of that challenge with a heroism that only God can measure. Her two sisters have been like her. One, Dr. Shiba, has

many years carried on the clinics in connection with our Kobe settlement; the other met her early death while working in it. It was the sacrifice of her lovely life that gave me the inspiration for the character of the heroine in the 'Grain of Wheat.'

"As I have said, the 'Wolf of Poverty ever pursues us.' It is my wife who manages our finances and faces this wolf with a dexterity and boundless courage that keeps it at bay. She is well named Haruko (Springtime). With her I live always in the beauty, strength, and marvel of the Spring."

Mrs. Kagawa herself is a writer of no mean ability and some of her books have been published in Europe. While her husband was studying in America, she improved the time in a Bible School in Yokohama eager to prepare herself to give her best in the chosen field of her partner. (See her "My Life as a Maid Servant and Factory Girl," and "Stories from the Slums," so far published only in Dutch and Japanese, an unpublished translation into English being still in manuscript.)

Kagawa has a remarkable combination of the mystical and the practical. He believes that his joy, and even ecstasy, in the consciousness of fellowship with God must express itself in the practical manifestation of love for men, and his vision and enthusiasm become contagious. After the great earthquake in 1923 when he was cooperating with the government in relief work, he found hundreds of refugees gathered about a Buddhist temple in Tokyo, sleeping in the open with the nights cold. The priest in charge refused to let a tent be put up at Kagawa's suggestion to shelter them. Kagawa discovered that the land belonged to the city and when the priest arrived the next morning he was astonished to see next to the temple a large tent with a cross on its top! Then Kagawa appealed to the priest on the basis



of his own Buddhist scriptures. "Even your temple" he said, "is dedicated to the Goddess of Mercy, yet all you are doing is to worship idols." The priest was so impressed that he plunged vigorously into social work and before he died had won the title, "Salvator Priest," by reason of his charitable work.

Nobody knows how many people in Japan have given their lives to the Kingdom of God movement as a result of Kagawa's preaching which attracts huge throngs. Possibly sixty thousand have signed cards indicating their decision to "try it," in their own lives. When you deal with Kagawa you deal with the demand of God whom he describes as "the Effort of Cosmic Will that would lift all and save all," and the demand is both profoundly social and inescapably personal. Dr. Gordon tells of speaking for Kagawa in a crowded hall in a Japanese city. People were standing in the doorway and out in the street straining their ears. All of a sudden the speaker was interrupted by loud voices. A policeman was pushing his way through the crowd toward the platform. In front of him he was shoving a criminal who was well known for his vicious and dangerous character. "Go to Kagawa," yelled the policeman in the criminal's ears, giving him a final shove in the right direction, "he has what you need."

For those of us who live on the West Coast there is a unique opportunity, still largely unexplored, to work for peace and the Kingdom of God around the Pacific Basin, and that is to back up this untiring, radiant person who humbly says "I am a gambler for God. I stake all on Him,—my money, my position, my reputation.'



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